

The Birth of the Gambler

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Category: Newsies

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 1999-09-13 09:00:00

Updated: 1999-09-13 09:00:00

Packaged: 2016-04-27 10:41:59

Rating: K

Chapters: 1

Words: 2,711

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: This is the story of a young boy named Anthony Higgins and his struggle from being an abused child to a Manhattan newsie.

The Birth of the Gambler

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The Birth of the Gambler

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"Anthony Higgins, get your butt in this house," a voice called from an upstairs window.

"No, Dad. I'm not coming in. You can't make me," Anthony shouted back at him.

"Well, we'll see about that," his father retorted.

From where he stood, Anthony could hear his father stomping out of his room and down the stairs. The stomping continued until it reached the door, and the door opened. When Anthony saw his father, he grabbed his bag from the ground, and started running like wildfire. His father had a temper, and he got mad quickly these days. When he was drinking, his temper flared up much faster. This was one of the days.

Thirteen-year-old Anthony kept running while his father chased him. He chased him all the way through town until his father could run no more. His father stopped running because he was exhausted. Anthony just kept running, even though his father was no longer chasing him. Running for a while, he didn't stop until he was well outside of town. The nearest landmark was the trainyards.

Sitting down on a nearby railroad tie, dropping his bag on the ground, he started to figure out what he was going to do now.

'What am I going to do now? I'm not going back home, that's a given, but I can't stay around here. There are too many people around here, who know me. If one of them catch me, they'll return me back to my house. No, thank you.'

Sighing, he picked his bag up, and started searching through it. After a minute or so, he found what he was looking for. Pulling his arm out, he was holding a deck of worn out cards. He started to shuffle them while he was thinking.

These cards were the reason he had left home. His father was hard set against them, and was always preaching him about the sin of card playing. Anthony loved playing cards, especially when he played with his brother. They were a fun pair. However, they had to play in secret because their father would take away the cards if he ever caught them with a deck.

'Those cards belong to the devil,' their father would say whenever he found them with a deck. 'They'll be the end of both of you.'

Each time he took the deck, he always hid them someplace he thought Anthony wouldn't find them. That was not the case. No matter where their father hid them, Anthony always found the hiding place, and he took the deck back.

Once the deck was well shuffled, Anthony dealt the cards into a game of solitaire. This was something he always did before he went to bed. He played a few games of solitaire. Something to relax him until he was ready to go to sleep.

While he was playing, a man walked up behind him, and watched him play. He was close to winning when the man sat down and continued to watch the game. Without turning his head or missing a move, Anthony asked,

"Yes? Is there something I can do for you?"

"Maybe," the man replied as he still watched the game.

After laying the last card, Anthony looked at him and raised his brow, questioningly.

"Can I help you?" He repeated his question.

"First off, my name's Jerry Amrine," He held out his hand, and they shook hands. "What's yours?"

"Anthony Higgins."

"Hi, Anthony. Nice to meet you."

"Yeah, same here, but what do you need?"

"Just wondered if you wanted to play a round of poker? Do you know how to play?"

"Yeah," I know how," he said. Thinking about it, he shrugged his shoulders, and told him. "Sure, I'll play."

Jerry stood up and gestured for Anthony to follow him. He did, and he was led to a table that was set up by a fire. They both sat down, and Jerry dealt them both a hand of cards. After looking at their cards, Jerry opened the game, and they got started.

AN HOUR LATER

Anthony was starting to sweat. He had been doing well, but after about a half-hour, he started to lose his hand, and his money. This was something he couldn't figure out. Whenever he played with his brought, he always did well. Why not now?

Finally, the last of his money went to Jerry. Jerry chuckled as he saw the look of defeat come across Anthony's face. Shaking his head, Jerry asked,

"Anthony, do you know what just happened?"

"Yeah, I know what happened. You won all my money."

"That's not what I mean. I was talking about your playing. I knew when you had a good hand."

Surprised, Anthony asked,

"How? I never said anything or did anything that implied that I had a good hand."

"Oh, but you did."

Confusion came across his face, so Jerry continued by saying, "Every time you got good cards, you covered your mouth with your hand, so you couldn't smile. Then, when you got bad cards, you pierced your lips together."

Anthony slumped in his chair, and asked, "I was?"

"Afraid so," Jerry confirmed. Leaning closer, Jerry told him,

"When you plat this game, you need to watch your opponents: their expressions, their gestures, even the smaller emotions, you would normally miss. Those can really help you. Plus, it can make you break you game."

Leaning back in his seat, Anthony asked,

"Does this really work?"

"Yeah, it does. I had your same problem years ago, and I was taught by someone, just what I am willing to teach you."

"Really? Are you willing to teach me?"

"Sure, I'll do that."

A FEW HOURS LATER

Jerry had now taught him everything he needed know, and Anthony excelled at it. There was nothing that could be him. This pleased Jerry, and he told him so. It wasn't often that he found a person

with his quickness for learning.

It was getting late, and Jerry was through with his teaching. So he said,

"Well, Anthony, you've learned everything that I can teach you. Now all you have to do is keep practicing until you're one of the best readers around."

Reaching out, Jerry shook Anthony's hand, and turned to leave. Anthony stood up, and asked,

"Where are you going? You're not leaving now, are you?"

Turning back to him, Jerry nodded his head, and said, "Yes, I have to leave now. I've come to teach you what I was supposed to. This teaching was to be part of what makes you who you are. Now that that's done, I have to go find the next person, and teach them."

"How do you know this person?" Anthony asked.

"I just do," Jerry replied, and walked away.

Anthony watched him as he walked away in the midnight mist, and completely disappeared. Suddenly, he became very tired. Looking around, he spied an open boxcar, so he grabbed his bag, and walked towards it. After looking, to make sure no one was around, he threw his bag in, and jumped in.

Once in the boxcar, he saw that there were mounds of hay all over. So he chose a mound, and laid down, and fell asleep quickly. His sleep was deep and happy because he wasn't at home to hear his father ranting and raving about the newest trouble.

*** THE NEXT MORNING ***

Anthony woke up to loud noises. He looked up and it was a cop, banging his club on the floor or the boxcar. The cop was searching the cars, looking for strays. Coming across Anthony, he figured that he didn't need to send this kid in, so he was going to let him go. When Anthony was awake and out of the car, the cop went on his way as he searched the rest of the cars.

Leaving, the trainyard, Anthony realized that he was no longer in his hometown. Looking around, he saw that he was in a city, and it was big. Finding the first person, who would talk to him, he asked,

"Excuse me, where am I?"

"Yous in New Yawk," the young man said.

He was a young man with a red bandanna around his neck, and a cowboy hanging from his neck. In his hand was a stack of papers, Anthony realized that he was a newsie. There were newsies back home. The job always looked fun whenever he saw one of the boys trying to sell his papers.

Pointing to the papers, Anthony asked,

"Is that a hard job?"

"Naw, not always," the young man said. He looked Anthony over, and asked, "Why do ya ask?"

"Because I want to be a newsie."

"Oh, ya do, do ya?"

He nodded his head, hopefully. This was what he wanted to do, and he had to anyway. Considering he was new to the city, and he had no money.

"Well, if dats what ya want, follow me. By da way, me names Jack Kelly. What's yours?"

"Anthony Higgins."

"Nice ta mee ya," Jack said and they continued on their way.

They headed through the city and on the way, Jack sold the rest of his papers. Finally, they reached a big house with a sign over it that said, "Newsboy Lodging House." Going in, Jack signed him in and introduced him to the old man behind the counter.

"Hey, Kloppman. Dis is Anthony. He's going ta be a newsie."

"Welcome," Kloppman said. He pulled a book out from underneath the counter and put it in front of Anthony. Giving him a pencil, Kloppman said,

"You need to sign this book every night when you come in. That way I can keep track of you."

Anthony smiled, and wrote his name in the book. Putting down the pencil, he followed Jack as he went up the stairs. When they arrived in the bunkroom, all the guys were huddled in the middle of the floor. As he and Jack got closer, it was shown that some of them were playing poker. Smiling, Anthony realized that he would get to play with his new bag of tricks.

Jack motioned for them to put there game on hold. They did, and turned around to see him standing next to a new guy. Now they gave him their full attetion. Motioning towards Anthony, Jack said,

"Alright, guys. Dis here is Anthony Higgins. He's going ta be a newsie."

"Hi," they all called out.

Anthony waved his hand, and smiled. Jack took him around the room as he introduced him to all the newsies. Finally, all the guys were introduced to him, and they went back to their game. Walking closer to the crowd, Anthony watched as the players played their game. What they didn't know was that he was watching them play, just like Jerry taught him. Smiling to himself, he continued to watch until one of them gave up for the night.

The three remaining players, Kid Blink, Specs and Mush, weren't ready to give up for the night, so they looked around, hoping for another participant. It seemed like no one wanted to volunteer, so they started picking up their money, Anthony said,

"What guys, I'll play."

They all looked at him, and then at each other. As if an unspoken agreement went between them, and they all nodded, as they returned to where they were sitting. Kid Blink was the one with the cards in his hands, so he dealt them all their cards

Looking at his cards, Anthony realized that he had a good hand. He almost lost it, but he remembered what Jerry had taught him, and kept himself under control. Watching the others, he was able to figure out their movements, and was able to work the game to his advantage.

THIRTY MINUTES LATER

Kid Blink, Specs, and Mush were sweating a little over their cards. Anthony had been winning the entire time, and they were struggling just to keep a hold of that they had. They were on their last hand, and the pot was big. Each of them wanted to win that hand, and they were working for it.

Finally, they laid down their cards, and the winner was Anthony. He smiled and collected all the money. The three players grumbled because they each thought they were going to win. Kid Blink was surprised that Anthony had won. He mumbled to everyone,

"Hey, since he's so good at poker, maybe he should go ta da tracks."

Anthony had heard him, and he always wanted to go there. There was one in his hometown, but his father never let him go. He was always saying,

'Those tracks belong to the devil,' their father would say whenever he overheard him talking about the tracks. 'They'll be the end of both of you.'

Anthony shook his head, and thought, 'Dad must think everything belongs to the devil. If so, why does he drink?'

"Hey, yeah," Anthony said, when Kid Blink mumbled the suggestion. "Can we go?"

"Anthony," Kid Blink groaned. "I's just kidding."

"Aw, man," Anthony moaned, and slumped down as he picked up the rest of his money.

Jack smiled and shook his head. Walking over to Anthony, he said,

"How about we's go ta da tracks after we's done selling?"

Anthony looked up at Jack and smiled. Standing up, he said, "Thanks,

I appreciate it."

By that time, it was time for bed. Jack told Anthony where he was to sleep, and they all went to bed for the night.

THE NEXT MORNING

Everyone was up, and it was a beautiful day. This was going to be a great selling day. It was decided that Anthony would go with Jack that day because that what happens with all the new newsies. Jack always teaches them the ropes.

That day, they were going to sell down by the tracks since they were going to be going there later that day. Anthony picked up the art of selling relatively quickly. This wasn't new for him. He always picked things up fast. If they are things he wants to learn. If it's something he doesn't want to learn, he as stubborn as a mule.

By lunchtime, they had all their papers sold, so he and Jack went into the racetracks. Anthony was in awe. There was so much to see there. Running ahead, he went to the fence that surrounded the track. Leaning against the fence, he watched the horses at they rounded the track. Jack was standing next to him, and watched him.

Walking up beside him, he said,

"Ya like the races?"

"I sure do. Back home, my dad never let me go to the races. Now that I'm not at him, I'm going to come as much as I can."

"Well, I guess wes got yous newsie name," Jack commented.

"Huh? Newsie name?"

"Yeah, every newsie has a newsie name."

"So what's mine?"

"Racetrack."

"Racetrack?"

"Yeah, since it seems yous gonna be at da tracks a lot, dat sounds like a good name for ya."

"Racetrack," Anthony said to himself. "Hmmm."

After a minute of thinking it over, Anthony said, "I like it. That's my name. I'm no longer Anthony."

Jack smiled and gently slapped his shoulder. Sitting down, they spent a portion of the afternoon watching some of the races. When it was time to leave, they headed back to the lodging house. Like the night before, all the guys were, in the middle of the floor, playing more poker. They all heard him come in, and they said their hellos.

Getting their attention, Jack made an announcement.

"Anthony chose a name ya guys. He is now called Racetrack."

They all clapped for him because they all liked the name. Now he was like the rest of them because he had chosen a newsie name. For the rest of their days, they would know him as that, and nothing else.

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